



State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

P.O.Box 729

TRENTON, NJ 08625-0729

CHRIS CHRISTIE
Governor

KIM GUADAGNO
Lt. Governor

ALLISON BLAKE, PH.D., L.S.W.
Commissioner

June 18, 2012

An Open Letter to Resource Families and Out of Home Placement Providers:

DCF continues to remain committed to ensuring that children and youth have the opportunity to maximize connections with the important people in their lives and to fully participate in their schools, neighborhoods and communities – even when they are in out of home placement. In essence, we want children and youth involved with DCF to have the most normal childhood and adolescence possible.

Key regulations have been written and enforced to ensure that all children and youth residing in foster care, treatment programs, and transitional housing have their safety, well-being, and case/treatment goals met. These regulations promote contact with family and friends and access to the community for recreation, education, and employment. We recognize however that opportunities exist to enhance and update these regulations, and our practice overall, in order to best serve our children and youth residing in an out of home care setting. Thus DCF will need to embark on a significant change effort that is focused on reviewing and strengthening our practice culture, regulatory, and contracting processes.

In order to help us achieve this goal, I am pleased to announce that I am convening a **Task Force on Helping Youth Thrive in Placement (HYTIP)** which will be charged with studying these opportunities and making recommendations for change. To provide leadership to this work, I have appointed Jessica Trombetta, Director of the DCF Office of Adolescent Services and Tony Conover, a member of the Statewide Youth Advisory Board, to be co-chairs. HYTIP will be charged with utilizing the Youth Thrive™ protective and promotive factors for healthy development and wellbeing as the framework for this change effort. This will include engaging in a broad discussion that identifies the specific areas (i.e. licensing regulations, contracting, service models, training, resource availability, etc.) where work will be required to achieve our goals. The Task Force will also develop recommendations in an interim report to be reviewed by me. Priorities will be identified and workgroups will be established to begin our work towards infusing the Youth Thrive™ framework into our practice.

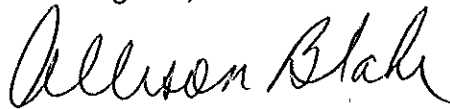
As a first step in this process I would like to further emphasize for all of our system partners that while children and adolescents are in placement, we expect that you will be helping them to maximize and sustain their connections by "encouraging contact with all family members and supports". Therefore a child or adolescent should not be limited to who they can contact rather a "no contact list" should be created of those individuals who are unsafe or unhealthy for them to stay in contact with. A youth's "contact list" needs to be developed in partnership with the youth, DYFS and/or DCBHS case manager. In addition, when working with adolescents and young adults who are preparing for and transitioning into for adulthood, these youth need access to functioning computers and the internet to assist with educational and employment

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planning and decision-making and other life skills related resources (understanding that this may mean taking youth to a local public library if computers are not available in the current residence).

Thank you for your continued efforts on behalf of our children and adolescents, we look forward to working with you as we strive to achieve normalcy for all children and adolescents in placement.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Allison Blake". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Allison" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Blake".

Allison Blake, Ph.D., L.S.W.
Commissioner

c: Jessica Trombetta, Director, Office of Adolescent Services